

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /060 W
----- 079505 /46

R 211104Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1018
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 8690

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: OPPOSING FACTIONS ON BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND
THREATEN TO CONVENE EXTRAORDINARY PARTY CONGRESS

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 8644, (B) DAMASCUS 8116

1. EMBOFF TOLD BY SYRIAN DISSIDENT HAMOUD SHOEFI DEC. 18
THAT RIVALRY IS INTENSIFYING BETWEEN TWO FACTIONS ON BAATH
PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND, SUPPORTERS
OF RIF'AT AL-ASAD AND A DRUZE/SUNNI GROUP CENTERED
AROUND MUHAMMAD JABIR BAJBUJ AND INCLUDING SENIOR SUNNI
MILITARY OFFICERS MUSTAFA TLASS AND EX-RC MEMBER NAJI
JAMIL. ACCORDING TO SHOEFI, BOTH FACTIONS HAVE THREATENED TO
CONVENE EXTRAORDINARY RC CONGRESS TO GIVE OPEN HEARING TO THEIR
CHARGES. RIF'AT HAS ACCUSED BAJBUJ, TLASS AND JAMIL IN PAST OF
FORMING SECTARIAN POWER BLOC, WHILE JAMIL AND PERHAPS TLASS HAVE
CHARGED RIF'AT WITH CORRUPTION (REF B).

2. SHOEFI ADDED THAT LAST TWO SCHEDULED MEETINGS
OF RC FAILED TO TAKE PLACE BECAUSE QUORUM NOT PRESENT.
HE SAID THIS INDICATED DIMINISHED COHESION
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WITHIN RC AS WELL AS PRES. ASAD'S CONCENTRATION ON
OTHER PROBLEMS. SHOEFI HIMSELF DOWNPLAYED SIGNIFICANCE
OF RIVALRY WITHIN RC IN COMPARISON WITH PRES. ASAD'S
TROUBLES WITH ALAWITE COMMUNITY AND FOLLOW ALAWITE
OFFICERS.

3. ANOTHER SOURCE WHO PROVIDES GENERALLY RELIABLE INFORMATION ADVISED US DEC. 19 THAT PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI IS INCREASINGLY SIDING WITH SUNNI FACTION OF BAATH LEADERSHIP AND ADDED THAT, ACCORDING TO HIS INFORMATION, COS SHIHABI, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS "NON-BAATHIST", WAS ALSO SHIFTING TOWARD CLOSER ASSOCIATION WITH HIS FELLOW SUNNI OFFICERS.

4. COMMENT: WE DOUBT PRESIDENT WOULD CONVENE RC CONGRESS UNLESS CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO DOMINATE IT AND USE PROCEEDINGS TO HIS ADVANTAGE. IN LIGHT OF CURRENT STRAINS UPON REGIME, WE BELIEVE HE WOULD NOT FIND THIS PROPOTIOUS TIME FOR SUCH A GATHERING. SECTARIAN STRAINS ON RC MAY ALSO BE THE SOURCE OF LOCAL RUMOR CAMPAIGN AGAINST RIF'AT AL-ASAD (REF A).
MURPHY

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